**Sport Marketing Interview**

Christopher S. Guillory

Texas A&M University-Commerce

Marketing and Public Relations in Sports

Dr. Hoyeol Yu

April 7, 2025

Introduction

In order to uphold the integrity of an institution and avoid marketing nightmares it is important for an Athletic Director to be well versed in the ways they plan to deal with modern day “hot topics.” Some of these hot topics include navigating diverse religious backgrounds, the protection of title IX, substance abuse concerns, and violence in sports.

It is often even more challenging to navigate some of these “hot topics” at small institutions and in small towns where the impact of decisions is felt heavily among the community and can result in poor press and marketing. For this reason, I chose to interview Dr. Jesse Thomas, the Athletic Director of Cardinal Christian, a small private homeschool organization located in Midland, Texas. As Athletic Director, Dr. Thomas is responsible for the logistics, overall program forecasting, operations, and marketing of the participating sports teams. Dr. Thomas received his doctorate degree in Kinesiology with Sports Management specialization from Texas A&M University in 2010. Upon graduating he has worked exclusively at Cardinal Christian for the last 15 years, but is considering moving towards public institutions for personal reasons. Tuition is the primary source of revenue for Cardinal Christian Athletic Department and there is only one sponsorship relationship with Galliger Brother’s Automotive. Before working as an Athletic Director, Dr. Thomas had plans to compete in professional football, but was injured in his senior year of high school. He aspired to work as an Athletic Director ever since.

The purpose of this research paper was to interview Dr. Jesse Thomas regarding his experience as Athletic Director and how he makes difficult decisions for the department which can have detrimental implications on marketing within a very small homeschool community. Data was collected by pen and paper from a phone interview with Mr. Thomas on the evening of April 6th, 2025. Questions were pre determined in order to assess his ability to navigate these difficult scenarios and in order to draw connections on how decisions can impact marketing.

Interview Findings

One of my very first questions to Dr. Thomas was how he navigates various religious backgrounds within the sports teams. I referenced the fast of Ramadan in the Muslim community and was curious if he had made any formal exemptions for students during this religious observance. I discussed my own research and how Muslim athletes have noted that schools and coaches have often overlooked their needs, provided inadequate resources, and ultimately failed to take into consideration the impact the fast has on their bodies while training and competing.

As a Christian school, we really do not have many diverse religious beliefs. Of course there are high school students who don’t have the same faith as their parents, but this has not really been a pressing issue. Christian Cardinal has a very clear Christian background and so those in attendance expect it to have some level of religious bias. That being said, if we had students who wished to attend, but did not hold the Christian faith, we would certainly require our coaches to give appropriate breaks and exemptions as needed.

Another question I asked included how Dr. Thomas would approach Title IX provisions which require equal opportunities for female students and athletes.

Although Title IX does not technically apply to Christian Cardinal, as we are not federally funded, I have made it my aim to ensure that there are equal opportunities for female students and athletes. We pay for the highest quality training and gear and offer sports teams for both sexes. We even have a girls football team by demand! Although many people assume a small community would not have as many controversial components, there is a lot to manage and the community is always watching us closely. In fact, a huge argument for Title IX is the protection of women in sports. We have a strict policy against allowing girls on the boys team and vice versa. We do not allow trans gender yahoos to choose which teams they compete on. If you were born male you compete with males.

Shifting gears towards steroid use and violence, I asked several questions to assess just how Dr. Thomas tackles these conflicts within his department. What policies are in place to prevent steroid use? How is violence addressed and is it celebrated or discouraged? Dr. Thomas stated that he has zero tolerance for both as his goal for Cardinal Christian Athletic Department is to prepare honorable, hard working, and excellent athletes for NCAA compliance and performance. Student athletes are drug tested at two random points through out the season. He mentioned that the previous Athletic Director did not uphold the same values and when the community found out the institution lost a lot of students and nearly dissembled altogether.

This was actually one of the ways I was able to step into the Athletic Director role so quickly. The previous Director was well aware of steroid use on the Power Lifting team. When some of the young student athletes openly injected themselves at official sporting events against some local public schools there was of course community outrage. Not only did we lose opportunities to compete against neighboring schools… it took a long time before anyone wanted to associate with Cardinal Christian.

In regards to violence, Dr. Thomas stated they do not encourage violence and this has never really been a problem once steroids were eliminated from the equation. The only infractions that have occurred are minor hazing incidents where the team has dunked water on the newcomers, but no one really takes offense to this and it is merely harmless tradition.

As the interview came to a close I asked Dr. Thomas if there was any particular marketing strategy he is seeking to obtain whether through social media or sport sponsorships. Dr. Thomas stated that they do not have a heavy online presence and this is his next strategy. He hopes to create a website which will increase student and athlete enrollment. He also indicated that he would like to reach out to larger companies for sponsorship relationships as they have only ever maintained sponsorship relationships with one local business at a time (usually a business associated with one of the schools affiliate families).

Connections

Dr. Thomas was aware of how “hot topics” including diversity with religion and Title IX can impact the marketing of his institution. However, having only remained at one small institution for the duration of his 15 year career, I felt as though he lacked the depth of which the implications of failing to provide resources could damage the institutions reputation. He seemed to understand the impact when it came to steroid use and violence, as there had been an incident that threatened the position of the previous director, but failed to see the importance of delicately handling situations of other faiths and the LGBTQ community. He should have kept out the descriptor “yahoos” when discussing his policy on gender identity in sport affiliation. Certainly everyone is entitled to their own personal opinion, but it is important to be careful with how you discuss sensitive topics. With the hopes of gaining larger sponsorships, I would hope he would consider these aspects more carefully in the future.

The second connection that I made was the importance of appealing to ones “audience.” Dr. Thomas mentioned several times that Cardinal Christian has a faith based background and so a lot of his decisions reflect the desires of this group at large. I do see value and importance in this, however, as director I also see the importance of truly understanding diverse backgrounds. I was happy to hear that he stated he would provide resources for those of different faiths within sports should the need arise.

My third and final connection was the importance of a marketing plan. I was moderately disappointed that the institution does not have any online presence as this is such an important tool for exposure. Dr. Thomas spoke a lot about reputation and good standing within the community. He mentioned efforts from sports teams to serve the community and how typically one large local business has been affiliated through out the years (currently Galliger Brother’s Automotive). I think it is wonderful that this is a way he hopes to expand and build through an online marketing venture.

In conclusion, I learned a lot about how important good bedside manners are as an Athletic Director and how this impacts marketing. Perception often becomes reality and who will or will not work or affiliate with a group/institution presses largely on reputation. In the future I would like to interview an Athletic Director from a college or public high school to ascertain any differences.

**References**

Amjad, M., Cavallario, J. M., Harris, N. A., & Welch Bacon, C. E. (2024). Muslim Collegiate Student-Athletes’ Experience With Fasting During Ramadan While Participating in Sport. *Journal of Athletic Training*, *59*(5), 474–486.

Greydanus, D. E., & Merrick, J. (2022). Aggression, violence, and sports: Lessons from Milo of Croton. *International Journal of Child Health and Human Development*, *15*(4), 291–295.